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Posted on 12 February 2019 By Ngaio Marsh

# #FREE PDF ? Off with His Head - eBook or E-pub free

This was a reread I remembered the basics, but not all the details. Actually, I was impressed what a strong impression some parts left, while other parts I remembered as being completely different. A good Ngaio Marsh, but not her best. Just ok 2 stars on my personal scale. I listened to this one on Audible and although Nadia May is usually a favorite narrator, the rural accents of some characters were almost unintelligible and the constant descriptions of folk dances didn't make sense. I don't know if reading the book would've helped me to make sense or be interested. I found it interesting once the murder occurred during a performance of a folk dance, and Inspector Alleyn and crew arrived to investigate. Then it became rather obvious who the killer was, and I skimmed the last few chapters to the end. Some interesting characters, but this one really didn't hold my interest.

#FREE PDF ¶ Off with His Head ? A Ritual Dance Becomes A Murderous Mambo  
At The Winter Solstice, South Mardian S Swordsmen Weave Their Blades In An Ancient Ritual Dance But For One Of Them, The Excitement Proves Too Heady, And His Decapitation Turns The Fertility Rite Into A Pageant Of Death Now Inspector Roderick Alleyn Must Penetrate Not Only The Mysteries Of Folklore, But The Secrets And Sins Of An Eccentric Group Who Include A Surly Blacksmith, A Domineering Dowager, And A Not So Simple Village Idiot My favourite Ngaio Marsh story is the one that does not involve the theatre or New Zealand. Death of a Fool is set in a snowy English village holding out against the 20th century. It could easily be silly, but Ngaio Marsh is far too good a writer to slip into that error. The story has a village smithy, a medieval folk dance, eccentric gentry, a village natural, and an artsy German folklorist doing a wonderful imitation of the modern obsession with ethnicity. I am in awe of a New Zealander who could have written a classic murder mystery in such a setting and absolutely pulled it off. Part of the enjoyment of this book was not only the excellent descriptions but the historical information regarding some of the ancient English folk dances and traditions occurring around the Christmas season. Marsh also presents material that would suggest that Shakespeare incorporated some of the folk themes in his King Lear. Marsh's knowledge of theatre was also very helpful. Ngaio Marsh, in the second of her mysteries I have read, shows herself to be a master of human observation. Marsh combines that with the ability to describe her well drawn characters using humor and engaging them with actions that hint at the psychology underneath. The murder mystery is a perfect genre for someone able to portray the smallest ripples of emotion and perception. One of these characters is capable of murder. In this mystery she has her detective, Alleyn, say Motive, I detest motive. Often many people have a motive, but which one is off the rails enough to take a life. In addition to her character skills Marsh sets this mystery deep in the rural north of England and we get to see what village life was truly like there not long after WWII. Great

book At this point in my rereading of Marsh I realize that I am having trouble seeing the books as they were received when first written and published This particular story bothered me particularly for a number of reasons First, Marsh s books continue to be painfully class ridden Members of the gentry are well educated, speak standard English and either privately wealthy or hold down jobs as artists, lawyers or doctors Members of the lower class are badly educated, speak painfully broad dialect and carry on the modern day equivalent of the jobs of their forebears The books was published in 1956 and yet it reads as if it were a flashback to a time far earlier. Second, one expects the murder mystery writer to use smoke and mirrors to distract the reader from the truth of whodunnit What is not reasonable is that her detectives should be able to solve the crimes they are investigating in little time if it were not for the fact that they are constantly unwilling to do their actual work In earlier books Alleyn felt uncomfortable requiring fingerprints from suspects and in later books he seems to feel uncomfortable actually asking questions People don t answer questions Police don t ask questions Suspects are allowed to mill around and move things In this particular case the SPOILER WARNING murderer spends much of the book ordering those who witnessed the murder to shut up whenever they come close to spilling the truth in front of police officers The only way Marsh can account for the difficulty of solving the case is to have the local police officers act like bucolic yokels and the men from Scotland Yard to spend of their time deferring to the gentry and feeling uncomfortable asking questions than doing the work they were called in do to. Marsh does not limit her stereotyping to the gentry and the peasants either The German woman in this book acts not like someone who has lived in England for years but rather as a recent refugee from the movie version of Nazi Germany Marsh also throws in, for good measure, a rather nasty picture of the those who are inappropriately interesting in British forkways Appropriate interest is felt by members of the British gentry Inappropriate interest is felt by foreigners who wear different clothes and speak with accents. Throw in a thoroughly broad and uninformed picture of epilepsy and you have a book that seems to have been designed to reflect the biases and preconceptions of the fairly narrow demographic that made up Marsh s readership. I did feel obligated to read this book I had checked out, trying to give this author another opportunity to capture my admiration The first stumbling block is the dialect of the blacksmith and family The next major problem is the staging of ancient dance that is too complicated to explain It seems to me that the play was the thing for Marsh, and for me the play and all the characters were annoying at best. In this 19th book in the Roderick Alleyn series, the British detective investigates the death of a folk dancer The book can be read as a standalone In the English village of South Mardian the winter solstice is marked by a complex ritual dance performed solely by men This year, not long after WW II, the major participants in the dance are the local smithy and his four sons who have a long ancestry in the area a village doctor, a parson s son lawyer, and a former army officer. The story acted out in the dance is described as resembling King Lear because it involves children in this case sons at odds

with their old father. The superstitious ritual includes donning elaborate costumes and dancing, reciting, jingling, chasing girls, and brandishing swords. Toward the latter part of the ritual one of the sons beheads the father, who sinks out of sight behind a boulder. Then, at the dramatic climax, the father is supposed to come back to life and jump up from behind the rock. This time, however, the father doesn't pop up. It turns out he's actually been beheaded. The entire village is on hand to watch the ritual dance, including an overbearing dowager and her eccentric niece, a sexy barmaid, a pretty young acting student, etc. Also present is a German visitor, a woman who studies and writes about English folklore folk dances. The lady is regarded with suspicion by some villagers, both because she's German and a woman. When Detective Roderick Alleyn shows up to investigate the murder he asks each dance participant and a number of observers to describe in excruciating detail all aspects of the dance. Every witness claims that no one went near the boulder shielding the old man between the time he was beheaded in the dance and the time he was supposed to rise up again. The questioning of witnesses takes up a large part of the book and is exceedingly repetitive and tedious. Moreover, since I didn't actually see the dance and am not familiar with British folk dancing, the descriptions were difficult to follow. And finally, when the murderer and modus operandi were exposed I couldn't picture it and it didn't make sense. In the time covered by the story various other things are going on in South Mardian: There's a Romeo and Juliet type romance the relatives don't approve the German woman acts peculiar and fears the police there's pressure on a couple to marry against their wishes because they were seen canoodling in the forest a product of those conservative times the smithy and his sons have real life arguments etc. The characters, however, are not well fleshed out and not terribly interesting. This is not one of Ngaio Marsh's best books. It seems like a book about British folk dancing than a mystery. I wouldn't recommend it. You can follow my reviews at







*Ngaiio*  
**MARSH**  
*Death of  
a Fool*



"It's time to start comparing Christie to Marsh instead of the other way around." —*New York magazine*

is the nineteenth, Roderick Alleyn novel, in what is a slightly infuriating series. If any author could be called inconsistent often brilliant, but too often banal, then Marsh is that author. Some of her mysteries are fantastic and there have been many that I have really enjoyed. However, this book, published in 1957, feels to be almost written by rote. We have a small village, a winter solstice, and bizarrely morris dancing. Add a stereotypical German folk specialist, a pair of lovers with, of course, objections to their being together, a group of bizarre villagers, all with their allegiances, secrets, motives and customs, and then, of course, it all ends in murder. So, we have a brief lead up to the crime, then Alleyn, and Fox, question everyone, finishing in a recreation of events and the murderer is unearthed. All rather formulaic, but I will read on, as, sometimes, she could be brilliant.

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Justice James Iredell

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